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40 firms win alt-transit kudos

Workers urged to use city bus, bike or car pool

By Richard Ducote

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Tucson-area employers are being recognized for offering incentives to entice workers out of their cars.

The Pima Association of Governments named 40 employers to its 2006 list of Greater Tucson Area Best Workplaces for Commuters.

On the Web

● For more information on the Best Workplaces for Commuters program, go to www.bwc.gov.

Promoters of the program say it improves employee job satisfaction and can save money through reduced payroll taxes.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency lists 1,885 employers nationwide for their efforts in promoting benefits to 3.5 million commuters in 41 states and the District of Columbia.

Large local employers making the list this year include the University of Arizona, Raytheon Missile Systems, IBM and Tucson Electric Power Co.

TEP provides free Sun Tran bus passes to any employee who wants to commute to work by city transit, said Jennifer King, a special-projects coordinator who works in the utility's Downtown office.

The company promotes car-pool vehicles with reserved parking spaces and offers bicycle racks and showers for riders at its Irvington Road operating headquarters, where about 800 employees work, King said. TEP also promotes alternative transit with incentives such as tickets to University of Arizona athletic events, she added.

Companywide, about 142 people have joined car pools, about 10 are taking buses, and a similar number are commuting by bicycle, she said.

To qualify for the list, employers must provide:

● At least one primary commuter benefit, such as transit and van-pool subsidies, cash in lieu of free parking, or a significant telecommuting program.

- At least three supporting benefits, such as lockers and showers for bicyclists and walkers, compressed work schedules, and preferred parking for van pools and car pools.
- A central information contact who keeps employees informed of available commuter benefits.
- Access to an emergency ride home.

Mary Ann Soto, employer representative in the PAG travel-reduction program, said nearly 300 Tucson-area companies are taking part in the travel-reduction program to some degree, and they inform 113,000 employees of commuting alternatives.

Among those workers, about 97,000 participate in the annual travel survey, and nearly 40,000 say they use some alternative mode of transportation during the year, Soto said.

The 40 companies on the Best Workplaces list offer superior efforts to reduce car travel and collectively employ about 50,000 people, she added.

In 2003, the first year of the local Best Workplaces list, 13 companies made the cut, Soto said.

Tax benefits also are offered to both employers and employees to promote such programs.

For example, employees can buy bus passes or van rides using pre-tax dollars, and employers can provide benefits such as van pools free of payroll taxes.

On the Web

- For more information on the Best Workplaces for Commuters program, go to www.bwc.gov.
- *Contact Richard Ducote at 573-4178 or rducote@azstarnet.com.*